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ABSTRACT

As a result of the alarming increases in student disruption, vandalism, drug abuse, and other forms of deviant behavior, school districts are becoming increasingly aware of the complexity of the problem and the numerous deficiencies of traditional approaches. For students to achieve their maximum potential, a strong framework of behavioral expectations must be established, widely communicated, and consistently enforced. In 1978, the Duval County Public School System, which provides educational services to a population of more than 600,000 people within a geographic area of 827 square miles, created the Code of Student Conduct as a foundation upon which all disciplinary decisions could be based. The code delineates three classes of student offenses (minor, intermediate, and major) and defines consequences for each. Because the code is administered throughout the district, students have fewer problems adjusting when they change schools. Further, current research data within the district indicate a decline in both major conduct code violations and in the cost of vandalism. The district, in developing programs that successfully retrieve, reintegrate, and redirect disruptive or potentially disruptive students to more appropriate standards of behavior, shows potential for the resolution of the problem within the public school community. (13 references) (KM)

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STUDENT DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES:

A Discipline Framework for Improved Student Behavior

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For students to achieve their maximum potential, a strong framework of behavioral expectations must be established, widely communicated, and consistently enforced. In the Duval County Public School System students are counseled and encouraged to conduct themselves within an established behavioral framework. The responsibility of the school district for developing positive standards of behavior is threefold.

First, the district has provided a framework for the policies and the incentive and instruction necessary for students, teachers, and administrators to operate successfully within the published guidelines. Secondly, the district monitors the actions and the conduct of students within the framework. And finally, programs to retrieve, reintegrate and redirect students to more appropriate standards of behavior have been developed by the local school district.

A Code of Student Conduct

The development of codes of law dates back to the earliest civilizations of man. One of the original codes, the Code of Hammurabi (1700 B.C.) represents the first effort by an empire to record all its laws. The intent of this early code was to simplify and clarify infractions of the law and to provide guidance in the punishment of those who broke the law. Today citizens of the United States find a myriad of legal codes in place. Whether a code regulates an entire nation or a small locale, codes are in place for the benefit of the governed.

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The Duval County Public School System created a Code of Student Conduct in 1978. This Code of Conduct is the foundation upon which all disciplinary decisions are based. The Code provides clear descriptions of students' rights and responsibilities, the role of students, parents, and the school in maintaining an atmosphere which is conducive for learning, the types of activities which are considered unacceptable, and the procedures for handling specific violations.

The Duval County Code of Student Conduct delineates three classes of student offenses and defines consequences for each class. Violations of the Code are grouped into three classes - minor, intermediate and major. Each classification is followed by a disciplinary procedure which is to be implemented by principals and their designees. The most serious offense is classified as a Class III. The principal is initially responsible for determining that a Class III offense has been committed. Some of the most common Code III offenses are alcohol, drugs, arson, battery upon School Board employee, robbery, grand theft, possession of weapons with intent to go armed, explosives, sexual acts. Commission of a Class III offense necessitates a disciplinary conference with the principal and a parent(s) or guardian. The principal may, at his or her discretion, recommend special programs provided by the school district. Should the parent(s) or guardian be offered this opportunity and decline it, the principal shall suspend the student and recommend expulsion. All documentation of the incident is sent to the School Board Hearing Officer. Should the School Board Hearing Officer recommend expulsion, that recommendation is forwarded to the Duval County School Board for final disposition pursuant to State law. This provides a fair and consistent structure of appropriate behavior for the student. Assertive Discipline (Canter, 1978) and behavior modification (Sloane, 1976) both support the use of punishments to correct misconduct.

Students receive orientation to the Code in a variety of ways. Some schools in the district integrate the Code into social studies classes as they discuss legal systems, their benefits and examples. Other schools conduct large and small group assemblies to discuss the Code, school newspapers communicate the Code, and pre and post tests are given to evaluate student comprehension of the policies.

The rationale for establishment of a student conduct code as a strategy is apparent. Since the Code is administered throughout the district, students have fewer problems adjusting when they change schools. Prior to implementation of the district-wide code, discipline was administered on a system of individual school based rules with a variety of punishments. The same student infraction was handled with different severity at different schools. Although the Code has district-wide application it maintains the flexibility to provide for individual differences. Annual review of the Code provides an opportunity for modifications based upon research and evaluation of disciplinary data for the previous year.

Current research data within the district indicates a decline in major Conduct Code violations.

Class III Violations for the Period 1983-1986

School Level	1983-84	1984-85	1985-86
Elementary	73	69	31
Junior High School	403	329	241
Senior High School	373	305	166
Total	849	703	438

A decline in the cost of vandalism is indicated by current data on the number of vandalism incidents and the annual cost of school district vandalism:

	1982-83	1983-84	1984-85
Number of Incidents	683	730	672
Dollar amount of loss	$365,981	$307,935	$103,090

The dropout rate for Duval County during the 1985-86 school year was 4.7% based on a population of approximately 45,000 students in grades 7 - 12.

Evidence of improved student achievement scores in Duval County is indicated by:

Nationally Standardized Test Scores: Increasing scores on the Stanford Achievement Test that top the 45th percentile in communications and the 61st percentile in math (50th percentile is the national average). Overall composite average for the district has risen to the 59th percentile; composite average scores in reading and math combined top the national average at every grade level.

Scholastic Aptitude Test: The highest scores in the eight years records have been kept. Verbal: 428, up 7 points, 7 higher than the state average, 10 above the southern average. Math: 472, up 2 points, 9 higher than the state, 16 above the southern average. 143 more students took the test than the year before.

Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT): For the first time PSAT scores by district juniors were above the national average. This occurred despite the fact that the number of students taking the test jumped from 1,578 to 1,850.

Advanced Placement Exams: A score of 3 or higher by 57 percent of students taking advanced placement exams. With an increase of 189 students taking the exam, an additional 137 passed over last year.

National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists: Twenty-four National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists, with 21 becoming finalists. Approximately three years ago when the Potential National Merit Scholar Program was initiated, this district had 15 National Merit Semifinalists and the private/parochial schools also had 15. This year we had 24; they had 9.

Black Student Achievement: Scholastic Aptitude Test scores of black students 31 points above the national average and 43 points above the state average for black students.

The Alternative School

The traditional approach toward disciplining a student who continues to "violate the Code" has been the repeated suspension of the student, expulsion, or a forced drop out from school. The fallacy of such approaches is the student is forced to operate outside of the system, and frequently considers the punishment imposed a reward from a system the student refuses to accept. The ultimate goal, however, is to encourage acceptable behavior within the system. The Duval County Alternative School program provides an intervention process for students who have exhibited a pattern of unresponsiveness and hostility to initial efforts of the school to control discipline problems. The Alternative School program does not emphasize course content, instead the focus is on the psychological and social development of the student. Duke (1978) strongly supports curriculum approaches aimed at reducing behavior problems. Slavin (1980) reported on a variety of special programs that require students to work together effectively, thereby minimizing the likelihood of class disruptions and distortions. Bybee and Gee (1982) support and analyze the teaching of conflict resolution and justice to reduce violence and destructive behavior.

Students with behavioral problems who cannot remain in the traditional school setting are referred to the Darnell-Cookman Counseling Center. This program provides intervention counseling and the strategies necessary to reinforce appropriate behavior and reintegration of the student into a traditional school setting. The Center was established as an alternative to expulsion. Students

are referred to the Alternative Counseling Program who have been charged with a Code III violation. The student spends a minimum of 20 school days at the center. During this period of time the student does not receive academic instruction in his regular course work. The student is responsible for obtaining make-up work after he returns to the home school. The program of studies is designed to provide individual counseling to the student. The counseling is made up of group and individual counseling activities. Each student participates in a drug and alcohol counseling class , an individual counseling period with a counselor, a math and language laboratory for maintenance of skills, and physical education. If the student attends regularly and does not demonstrate continued behavior problems he/she is transferred back to the home school. On the average seven hundred (700) students participate annually in the Darnell Cookman Counseling Center. The recidivism rate for the center is nineteen percent (19%). Upon exiting the Alternative School the student is evaluated a minimum of once a month by means of a progress report that is initiated by the assistant principal student services and guidance counselor. The progress report collects information about the student's grades, attendance, and behavioral problems. This report is sent to the parent and a copy is sent back to the Alternative School for evaluating the program and the progress of the students who have participated in the counseling program. Post evaluative reports on the majority of students attending the Center indicate improved academic performance, improved personal responsibility for their actions, and a significant decline in behavior problems for the student.

Prevention Programs

While a lack of consensus characterizes many aspects of school discipline, there is one area where agreement is almost universal - the need for prevention programs. Educators are urged to consistently enforce rules, apply sanctions, and communicate behavioral expectations. There is a major problem with this approach. Not all students are alike. Directives to "be consistent" may lead educators to overlook crucial differences among students that cause misbehavior. These differences should be identified and incorporated into prevention programs. Crucial differences can result in a student's negative attitude about school, health problems, poor academic performance, high incidence of absenteeism, and even an inability to cope with a loss.

Duval County has developed several prevention programs based on "crucial differences" in students that have been identified as disruptive in the traditional school setting.

Special Programs such as: CARE, Secondary Dropout Prevention, Individual Student Profile and Student and Grief address essentially the same problem, students who are having difficulty focussing their efforts toward school. These programs are based on strategies designed to assist the student with specific problems which may impact student behavior.

CARE (Changing Attitudes Regarding Education) is an elementary school program designed to identify students in the early years who are exhibiting a lack of interest in school and change their attitude concerning education. This is a team approach with administrators, teachers and guidance staff working cooperatively. The need for programs of this type is supported by writers like Stinchcombe (1964) who reported on a group of rebellious high school students whose behavior tended to be an outgrowth of their disinterest in school. In subsequent years researchers (Goodlad, 1984; Jones, 1984; Purkey and Novak, 1984) continue to insist that student behavior is a function, in part, of attitudes toward school.

Secondary Dropout Prevention Program The secondary dropout prevention program operates in Duval County secondary schools to intervene in cases where the student is considering leaving school permanently. A team is established in each school. This team is made up of the vice principal, teachers, assistant principal student services, and counselor. Referrals are made by teachers and staff members. The referrals contain valuable information about the student's academic and behavioral record. Interventions are recommended and committee members are assigned the responsibility for following up the interventions recommended for a specific student. The committee also reviews Individual Student Profiles to identify those students who are exhibiting behaviors that are characteristic of those problems associated with the potential dropout. The chairperson of the committee is required to send to the district guidance office a copy of the monthly interventions. The Dropout Prevention Program at the secondary level has proven its effectiveness as indicated by the 1985-86 school year dropout rate of 4.7% for the 7 - 12 student population of 45,000 students.

The Individual Student Profile (ISP) was begun in 1982. Through ISP individual teachers are provided a profile of academic achievement and health information for each student in their class. Through teacher identification individual students are referred to a prevention program team or counselor for special strategies and counseling. Researchers are beginning to recognize that individual differences among students may necessitate different classroom management strategies (Spaulding, 1983; Denham and Lieberman, 1980). The ISP has been a very positive tool for identifying individual differences and encouraging the teacher to develop plans for classroom management that match existing curriculum plans.

Student and Grief. Hostile reactions resulting from a student's feelings of anger at being left and separated from a loved one are often a part of the grief cycle. Such reactions often cause the child to misbehave in school, and the consequent punishment may lead to more persistent and agressive hostility. (Hawener, 1975). Children reacting to a death or loss often may be observed with physiological distress, guilt, anger and panic. Jones (1977) supports the need to assist students with a recent loss upon their return to school. He notes a loss can often result in a student demonstrating an inability to concentrate on his/her school work, day-dreaming, poor achievement, and a reluctance to attend class.

Responding to community input the Student and Grief Project was funded through a Business-Education Partnership and piloted during the 1984-85 school year. Ninety-five schools in the Duval system now have counselors or teachers trained to assist students in grief. This loss can be in the form of a death of a loved one, divorce, separation, mobility of family causing the student to transfer in and out of schools, loss of a pet or failure to live up to expectations of an adult. Children are referred to the program who have suffered some loss. After referral the student meets with a trained staff member for individual or group sessions. This project is a cooperative venture with the Duval County Public School System and Hospice of Northeast Florida, a non-profit organization. Ongoing research indicates that the program is on target. Seventy-five percent (75%) of the students surveyed indicated that the program helped them to continue in school and to keep their grades up. All of the students (635 in 1985-86) felt that the program was "... important enough to offer to all students."

Conclusion

The Duval County Public School System provides educational services to a population of more than 600,000 people within a geographic area of 827 square miles. The school district is the fourth largest in the State of Florida and one of the 20 largest in the nation, with an enrollment in excess of 100,000 students. Action research within this large urban school district has identified certain common elements in programs which successfully deal with disruptive and potentially disruptive students. Elements of successful programs include:

Student behavioral expectations that are identified, widely communicated, and equitably enforced,

Intervention programs that encourage the development of acceptable behavior within the system as opposed to external approaches (i.e., suspension, expulsion, dropout),

Sensitivity to crucial differences in students which may impact student behavior,

Awareness of a frequent relationship between disruptive behavior and recent student loss (i.e., death of a loved one, divorce, separation, family mobility, loss of a pet or failure to live up to expectations of a significant adult).

As a result of alarming increases in student disruption, vandalism, drug abuse, and other forms of deviant behavior school districts are becoming increasingly aware of the complexity of the problem and the numerous deficiencies of traditional approaches. The Duval County public school system has experienced a degree of success in dealing with disruptive students that is indicative of the potential for resolution of the problem within the public school community.

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